The Builder.

No. CCCLXVI.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1850.

MR. EWART asked in the House of Commons last Monday evening, to be told in what state of advancement the new House was, and how soon it was likely that it would be ready for the reception of members? — (Members tittered.) — Mr. Greene said it would be *difficult* to answer the first portion of his honourable friend's question, but if he wished to know whether the new House of Commons could be completed for the occupation of the members during the present session, he had no hesitation in saying that it would be possible to finish the chamber itself for the reception of members during the present session; but he apprehended it would be impossible to use it comfortably without the refreshment rooms, libraries, public and private approaches, and other adjuncts to the House, which were necessary to render it convenient. (Laughter.) He had written to Mr. Barry on the subject, and was informed by that gentleman in reply, speaking of these portions of the building, that they were now so far advanced towards completion, that if a sufficient vote were taken shortly (great laughter), it would be ready by the next session of Parliament. (Renewed laughter.)

It is much to be regretted that some member properly informed on this subject, if there be such, had not told the House and the country how the matter really does stand, and removed the impression which generally exists that the delay is to be attributed to the architect or the builder. Mr. Greene's reply, instead of removing, will strengthen the erroneous belief. In the Christmas burlesques of previous years, as we mentioned at the time, Barry was made the natural rhyme for "tarry." In the amusing piece of absurdity, called "Frankenstein," now current at the Adelphi Theatre, it is said, of one of the characters, that some of his designs he is—

"—— Long in getting through with,
Like certain Houses Barry has to do with;"

and so on all over the country; while, in truth, the delay rests wholly with the Commons themselves.

We walked from one end of the enormous building to the other, a few days ago, and were grieved by the air of desolation which everywhere prevailed:—had we known nothing of the truth, we should have fancied that the builder had gone wrong, and that a messenger from the court of bankruptcy was in possession,—a result, by the way, which would very probably have been brought about, as we will show presently,—if the builder had been a man of less substance than Mr. Grissell. Few workmen were to be seen except in one or two quarters; and these moved with that listlessness which follows want of energy in the direction. To a very large portion of the building nothing whatever has been done *for four years*:—there it stands in carcass just as it did four years ago! The first contract, commenced ten years since, and which was to have been completed in three years, is positively not yet wound up. In the Commons' lobby the scaffolding is standing exactly as it was eighteen months ago, and there are no orders yet given for building it. In the Commons' library there had not been a man at work for two or three years till last week, when three or four joiners were sent in to—take down some pedestal presses which had been put up. Here and there you may see other pairs of men amusing themselves pleasantly by altering a panel or putting up a moulding,—evidently set to it to prevent them from suffering from *ennui*, and avoid the necessity of discharging them altogether. Our readers who understand these things will laugh when we tell them, that the whole number of joiners now employed on the building is *thirty*;—four flies to eat up an elephant: they perhaps *may* get through the job if they live long enough, but it will be a weary while first.

The House of Commons, of which we gave a view a few weeks ago, has been standing still for six months.

The Commons' Refreshment Room, again, is exactly as it was one year and a half ago, and as it will be one year and a half hence, unless the Commons themselves permit it to proceed. Members who produced the "tittering" and "much laughter" of Monday night, and shrugged their shoulders to express their belief that under the present direction they never would get into their new quarters, surely cannot know the real facts of the case. They cannot be aware that the fault is their own, and solely their own; they can scarcely appreciate the injury they are doing the contractor, and the loss which will ultimately fall on the public.

Not very long ago the Government spent at least 20,000*l.* in the erection of workshops at Thames-bank, with provision of gas, water, and costly machinery, to admit of greater rapidity in the progress of the works: the machinery is silent, the shops empty, the expenditure lying waste, and here the contractor has no less than *fourteen thousand pounds' worth of materials*, timber and deals, wainscot, &c., purchased through the necessity of providing seasoned stuff for what was anticipated to go on, and which have been lying there and spoiling for four years. At this time, perhaps, he could buy them 20 per cent cheaper than he did then, to say nothing of the interest of money on the amount laid by. Quarries were leased, horses and plant bought, and other necessary steps taken to carry on the work as it ought to be done. The loss caused by the delay may be estimated. His establishment is of course partly broken up, and what is greatly to be deplored, a large number of skilled workmen, educated to what was required, are dispersed north and south.

What the state of the accounts are we will not inquire,—the contract is for prices only, and reasoning from experience in other cases, we will venture to assert that whether Government owe the contractor thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty thousand pounds, they are profoundly ignorant,—perhaps he is so himself: with a disagreement between the Government and the architect, as to who should pay for measuring the work, and the general apathy necessarily induced by the proceedings, this is almost certain to be the case.

Looked at every way, the results of the course which has been pursued are seen to be bad, and we would very seriously urge on the attention of Government, the importance of doing differently in future and proceeding vigorously with this great work: employment is wanted, loss is caused by delay,—nothing can be gained by it; enormous rents are being paid which might be saved, and the dignity of the country is in a degree compromised. Let a fund be raised for the purpose, to be paid off by annual grants for, say, twenty years, or provide the money in any other way, and there will then be little further opportunity, we venture to assert, for "much laughter," when the progress of the new Houses is referred to.*

We will take this opportunity to contradict a statement, commented on by some of our contemporaries, that the roof of Westminster Hall is to be raised: there is no truth in it.

CLASSIC AND GOTHIC.—VIGNOLA.

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

AN ordinary meeting of the Institute was held on the 4th, Mr. S. Smirke, V.P., in the chair, when Messrs. C. H. Gabriel, J. Norton, and F. W. Porter, were elected associates.

Mr. Scoles, hon. secretary, read a letter from Mr. Fuller, of Bristol, stating, with reference to the Educational Institute at Llandovery, that having contracted to execute the works under circumstances which he thought justified the step,† and finding it was contrary to the laws of the Institute, he forwarded his resignation as a member.

The Chairman said that so decided an infraction of their laws having been committed, there could be no question about the necessity of accepting the resignation.

The report and recommendations of the council as to the appropriation of the Royal gold medal, and with regard to the essay and designs received in competition for the silver medal of the Institute, and the Soane medallion, were read. With respect to the gold medal, the council recommended that it be presented to Mr. Barry, for the edifices erected by him; and the question being put to the meeting, it was unanimously confirmed.

As to the drawings submitted for the Soane medallion, and the essays for the Institute medal, the council advised that no award should be made. For the Institute medal only one essay had been received (subject, "On the Construction of Floors, Fire-proof, or otherwise"). For the Soane Medallion (subject, "A Design for a Parish Church,—style, Roman or Italian"), six designs were received, but in their opinion there was but one which approached the standard fixed, and this, besides departing from the printed instructions, inasmuch as the scale was smaller than that prescribed, and the drawings were coloured instead of being tinted in sepia, was open to many objections. These the report set forth with much severity.

The confirmation of the report was postponed, to enable the members to examine the drawings, &c.‡

Mr. Samuel Angell then read a very admirable paper, which we shall probably give *in extenso*, on "The Life, Genius, and Works of Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola," illustrated by plans and views of his works. After sketching the life of Vignola, the writer reviewed his works, and concluded with urgent advice to the rising members of the profession to study Italian architecture, which had been greatly neglected in favour of pointed architecture.

* Relative to the level of the new Houses, and the disastrous high tide of Tuesday in last week, by which a very large amount of property was destroyed, a correspondent says, "the water was many inches above the plinth or terrace, of the new buildings at Westminster, and was about a quarter of a foot higher than that of December last;" and he directs attention to two articles written by himself, in our volume for 1847, V., p. 11 and p. 83, on the "Progressive Rise of the River."

† See THE BUILDER, pp. 32 and 41.

‡ We have received several letters objecting to the severe requirements of the council in respect of the medals. We give a portion of one:—"May I venture to intrude a few lines relative to the report of the Council of the Institute on the designs for the silver medal, read last Monday evening. Never since I can remember has the Institute, as represented by its council, given the medal graciously,—often, as in the present case, it has not given it at all; but whenever it has awarded it, it has always done so under a kind of protest that the successful candidate did not fully deserve it. Now Sir, the council complains that there is not the same competition for, or the same eagerness to obtain their medals, as is manifested by the students of the Royal Academy and other places. I would submit, is not the cause to be found in their own conduct? I have known several persons who would certainly have competed had they not been deterred by the treatment they saw others receive. I am quite unconnected with any of the competition designs, and inclose my card.—E.

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